

THE \$1,000,000.00 MYSTERY

(By Harold McGrath)

NINTH EPISODE

(PRINTED IN THE CLIMAX-MADISONIAN EVERY WEDNESDAY.)

SHOWN AT THE OPERA HOUSE THURSDAY NIGHT)

and they've kidnaped her right under your nose! What was the number of that car?"

"Cut out that line of talk, young fellow; I know my business. They had the proper documents."

"But you hadn't brains enough to inquire whether they were genuine or not! You wait!" shrieked the chauffeur. "I'll have you broken for this work." He wheeled and ran back to his car, to find Susan and the countess in a great state of agitation. "They got her, they got her! And I swore on the book that they never should, so long as I drove the car."

Susan wept, and the countess tried in vain to console her.

And when Jones was informed he frightened even the countess with the snarl of rage which burst across his lips. He tore into the hall, seized his hat, and was gone. Not a word of reproach did he offer to the chauffeur.



Braine and the Countess.

He understood that no one is infallible. He found the blundering policeman, who now realized that he stood in for a while of the commissioner's carpet. All he could do was to give a good description of the man and woman. Word was sent broadcast through the city. The police had to be informed this time.

Late in the day an officer whose beat included the ferry landing at Hoboken said he had seen the three. Everything had looked all right to him. It was the motherly face of the one and the benign countenance of the other that had blinded him.

At midnight Jones, haggard and with the air of one beaten, returned home.

"No wireless yet?" asked Norton. "The George Washington of the North German Lloyd does not answer. Something has happened to her wires; tampered with, possibly."

"So long as we know they are at sea, we can remedy the evil. They will not be able to land at a single port. I have sent ten cables. They can't get away from the wire. If I could only get hold of the names of those damnable doctors who signed that document! Twenty years."

Jones bent his head in his hands, and Norton tramped the floor till the sound of his footsteps threatened to drive the moaning Susan into hysterics.

"It is only a matter of a few days," said Norton. "But can the child stand the terror?" questioned Jones. "Who knows that they may not really drive her insane?"

On board the George Washington every one felt extremely sorry for this beautiful girl. It was a frightful misfortune to be so stricken at her age.

"She is certainly insane," said one of the passengers, who had known Hargrave slightly through some banking business. "Hargrave wasn't married. He lived alone."

After the second day out Florence was permitted to wander about the ship as she pleased.

A good many of the passengers were mightily worried when they learned that the wireless had in some mysterious way been tampered with after the boat had made the open sea. It was impossible to put about. The apparatus must be fixed at sea.

And when finally Norton's wireless caught the wires of the George Washington he was gravely informed that the young lady referred to had leaped the rail off the Banks at night and had been drowned. She had not been missed till the following morning.

CHAPTER X.

The Past a Blank.

It was perfectly true that Florence had cast herself into the sea. It had not been an act of despair, however. On the contrary, hope and courage had prompted her to leap. The night was clear, with only a moderate sea running. At the time the great ship was passing the banks, and almost within hail she saw a fishing schooner riding gracefully at anchor. She quite readily believed that if she remained on board the George Washington she was lost. She naturally forgot the marvel of wireless telegraphy. No longer was a man hide at sea.

So, with that quick thought which was a part of her inheritance, she seized the life buoy, climbed the rail and leaped far out. As the great, dark, tossing sea swooped up to meet her she noted a block of wood bobbing up and down. She tried to avoid it, but could not, and struck it head on. Despite the blow and the shock of the chill water she instinctively clung to the buoy. The wash from the mighty propellers tossed her about, hit her

and yon, from one swirl to another, like a chip of wood. Then everything grew blank.

Fortunately for her the master of the fishing schooner was at the time standing on his quarterdeck by the wheel, squinting through his glass at the liner and envying the ease and comfort of those on board her. The mate, sitting on the steps and smoking his turning-in pipe, saw the master lean forward suddenly, lower the glass, then raise it again.

"Lord a'mighty!"

"What's the matter, cap'n?"

"Take a peek through this glass. I'm dreamin'!"

The mate jumped and took the glass. "Where away, sir?"

"A pint off th' sta'board bow. See somethin' white bobbin' up?"

"Yessir! Looks like some one dropped a bolster 'r a pillar overboard. . . . Cod's whiskers!" he broke off.

"Then I ain't really seein' things," cried the master. "Hi, y' lubbers!" he yelled to the crew. "Lower th' dory. They're women in th' water out there. I seen her leap th' rail. Look alive! Sharp's th' word! Mate, you go 'long."

The crew dropped their tasks and sprang for the davits, and the starboard dory was lowered in shipshape style.

It takes a good bit of seamanship to haul a body out of the sea, into a dancing baltailed dory, when one moment it is climbing frantically seaward and the next heading for the bottomless pit. They were very tender with her. They laid her out in the bottom of the boat, with the life buoy as a pillow, and pulled energetically for the schooner. She was alive, because she breathed; but she did not stir so much as an eyelid. It was a stiff bit of work, too, to land her aboard without adding to her injuries. The master ordered the men to put her in his own bunk, where he nearly strangled her by forcing raw boarders over her throat.

"Well, she's alive, anyhow."

When Florence finally opened her eyes the gray of dawn lay on the sea, dotted here and there by the schooners of the fleet, which seemed to be hanging in midair, as at the moment there was visible to the eye no horizon.

"Don't seem 't recognize nothin'!"

"Mebbe she's got a fever," suggested the mate, rubbing his bristly chin.

"Fever nothin'! Not after bein' in th' water half an hour. Mebbe she hit one o' them wooden floats we left. Them dinged liners keep on crowdin' us," growled Barnes, with a fisherman's hate for the floating hotels.

"Went by without a toot. See 'er, Jes' like th' banker's wife goin' 't church on Sunday. A mile a minute, for or no for, it's all the same 't them. They run us down an' never stop. What th' tarnation we goin' to do? She'll haff 't stay aboard till th' run is over. I can't afford 't yank up my mudhook this time o' day."

"Guess she can stand three 'r four days in our company, smellin' oil-cloths, fish, kerosene, an' punk 't'backo."

"If y' don't like th' kind o' 't'backo I buy your own. I ain't objectin' none."

"An' say, Mister, seen anythin' in th' papers about a missin' young woman?" asked some one.

"Missin' young woman? What's that?"

The man told the story of Florence's leap into the sea and her subsequent arrival at the cape.

"That's funny," said the stranger. "I don't recollect reading about any young woman being lost at sea. But those big liners are always keeping such things under cover. Hoodooes the ship, they say, and turning prospective passengers to other lines. It hurts business. What's the young girl look like?"

Florence was described minutely. The stranger teetered in his chair and smoked. Finally he spoke.

"She probably was insane. That's the way generally with insane people. They can't see water or look off a tall building without wantin' to jump. My business is insurance, and we've got the thing figured pretty close to the ground. They used to get the best of us on the suicide game. A man would take out a large policy today and tomorrow he'd blow his head off, and we'd have to pay his wife. But nowadays a policy is not worth the paper it's written on if a commits suicide under two years."

"You ain't tryin' to insure anybody in town, are you?"

"Oh, no. No work for me when I'm on my vacation. Well, I'm going to bed; and tomorrow morning I'll go out to Captain Barnes' beach and have a good swim. I'm no sailor, but I like water."

He honestly enjoyed swimming. Early the next morning he was in the water, frolicking about as playfully as a boy. He had all the time in the world. Over his shoulder he saw two women wandering down toward the beach. Deeper he went, farther out. He was a bold swimmer, but that did not prevent a sudden and violent attack of cramps. And it was a rare piece of irony that the poor girl should save the life of that secondhand who was the life of that secondhand who was the life of that secondhand.

Long hours afterward Norton opened his aching eyes. He could hardly move and his head buzzed abominably. What had happened? What was the meaning of this slow rise and fall of his bed? Shaughnessy!

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"Shaughnessy!" the reporter murmured. He sat up and ran through

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ciently recovered he returned to the village and sought the railway station, where the Western Union had its office.

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"I can try," said the operator.

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The day after the news came that Florence had jumped overboard off the banks, Vroom with a dozen other men had started out to comb all the fishing villages along the New England coast. Somewhere along the way he felt confident that he would learn whether the girl was dead or alive. If she was dead then the game was a draw, but if she was alive there was still a fighting chance for the Black Hundred. He had had some idea of remaining in the village and accomplishing the work himself; but after deliberation he concluded that it was important enough for Braine himself to

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"She goes with me, or you'll regret it."

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"I refuse to go without her!"

Barnes sighed. He was on land a man of peace, but there was a limit to his patience. He seized Braine by the shoulders and hustled him out of the house.

"Bring your proofs, mister, an' nothin' more'll be said; but till y' bring 'em, keep away from this cottage."

And, simple-minded sailor that he was, he thought this settled the matter.

That night he kept his ears open for unusual sounds, but he merely wasted his night's rest. Quite naturally, he reckoned that the stranger would make his attempt at night. Indeed, he made it in broad daylight, with Barnes not a hundred yards away, calking a dory whose seams had sprung aleak. Braine had Florence upon the chartered yacht before the old man realized what had happened. He never saw Florence again; but one day, months later, he read all about her in a newspaper.

Florence fought; but she was weak, and the conquest was easy. Braine was kind enough, now that he had her safe. He talked to her, but she merely stared at the receding coast.

"All right; don't talk if you don't want to. Here," to one of the men, "take her to the cabin and keep her there. But don't you touch her. I'll break you if you do. Put her in the cabin and guard the door; at least keep an eye on it. She may take it into her head to jump overboard."

Even the temporarily demented are not without a species of cunning. Florence had never seen Braine till he appeared at the Barnes cottage. Yet she revolted at the touch of his hand. On the second day out toward New York she found a box of matches and blithely set fire to her cabin, walked out into the corridor and thence to the deck. When the fire was discovered it had gained too much headway to be stopped. The yacht was doomed. They put off in the boats and for half a day drifted helplessly.

Fate has everything mapped out like a game of chess. You move a pawn, and bang goes your bishop, or your knight, or your king; or she lets you almost win a game, and then checkmates you. But there is one thing to be said in her favor—rail at her how we will, she is always giving odds to the innocent.

Mike Bannock was in the pilothouse, looking over his charts, when the lookout in the crow's nest sang out: "Two boats drift off the port bow, sir!" And Bannock, who was a first-class sailor, although a rough one, shouted down the tube to the engine room. The freighter came to a halt in about ten minutes. The castaways saw that they had been noted, and pulled gallantly at the oars.

There are some things which science, well advanced as it is, cannot explain. Among them is the shock which cuts off the past and the counter-shock which reawakens memory. They may write treatises after treatises and expound, but they never succeed

Norton decided to follow his man. He might be going on a wild-goose chase, he reasoned; still his first impulses had hitherto served him well. He looked careworn. He was convinced that Florence was dead, despite the assertions of Jones to the contrary. He had gone over all the mishaps which had taken place and he was now absolutely convinced that his whilom friend Braine and the Princess Perigoff were directly concerned. Florence had either been going to or coming from the apartment, and that memorable day of the abduction the princess had been in the dry goods shop.

Vroom took a downtown surface car, and Norton took the same. He sat huddled in a corner, never suspecting that Vroom was watching him from a corner of his eye. Norton was not keen today. The thought of Florence kept running through his head.

The car stopped and Vroom got off. He led Norton a winding course which at length ended at the door of a tenement building. Vroom entered. Norton paused, wondering what next to do, now that his man had reached his destination. Well, since he had followed him all this distance he must make an effort to find out who he was and what he was going to do. Cautiously he entered the hallway. As he was about to lay his hand on the newel post of the dilapidated stairs the floor dropped from under his feet and he was precipitated into the cellar.

This tenement belonged to the Black Hundred; it concealed a thousand doors and a hundred traps. Its history was as dark as its hallways.

When Vroom and his companion, who had been waiting for him, descended into the cellar they found the reporter insensible. They bound, blindfolded, and gagged him quickly.

"Saunders," said Vroom, "you tell Corrigan that I've a sailor for him tonight, and that I want this sailor booked for somewhere south of the equator. Tell him to say to the master that this fellow is ugly and disobedient. A tramp freighter, whose captain is a bully. Do you understand me?"

"I get you. But there's no need to go to Corrigan this trip. Bannock is in port and sails tonight for Norway. That's far enough."

"Bannock? The very man. Well, Mr. Norton, reporter and amateur detective, I guess we've got you fast enough this time. You may or may not come back alive. Go and bring around a taxi; some one you can trust. I'll dope the reporter while you're gone."

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